

3. Guidelines for Giving

8 And God will generously provide all you need. Then you will always have everything you need and plenty left over to share with others. 9 As the Scriptures say, "They share freely and give generously to the poor. Their good deeds will be remembered forever." ... 11 Yes, you will be enriched in every way so that you can always be generous. And when we take your gifts to those who need them, they will thank God.

- 2 Corinthians 9:8-9, 11 NLT

God provides for us generously, not so that we have more but so we can give more. When we display generosity to others, we bring glory to our generous God because we are his ambassadors to the world. This doesn't always mean giving money- it is an attitude of our hearts.

Pray and ask the Holy Spirit to guide your next steps towards generosity.

Below are some Basics to guide you in giving.

- Regular- develop a rhythm of generosity (1 Corinthians 16:2)
- Proportional – in keeping with what you earn (1 Corinthians 16:2)
- Sacrificial – not only from your excess (2 Corinthians 8:2)
- Voluntary – without shame of guilt (2 Corinthians 9:7a)
- Joyful – reap the benefits of blessing others (2 Corinthians 9:7b)
- Motivated by Apprenticeship to Jesus (2 Corinthians 8:9)

WRAP-UP

God's perspective on greed, abundance and ownership contradicts just about everything we have been taught about money. It can be compelling and challenging. But as we loosen our grip and shift our trust from unreliable riches to a faithful and generous God, we can be shaped to be more like Him. We will enjoy a better kind of abundance that opens us up for God to move in in our lives in ways we might otherwise miss. And we can be a conduit of God's love and generosity to others.

MEMORY VERSE

10 Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness!

- Ecclesiastes 5:10 NLT

Challenge-Enjoy something in life and share it with someone. Maybe take someone out to dinner or treat a struggling kid an ice cream. Share your life and time generously in celebration with others.

What is Mine? The Way of Generosity - Week 3

INTRODUCTION

As we continue to explore God's perspective on generosity we may be challenged in our assumptions about money. In fact, this could get downright uncomfortable. Do we realize what we have allowed to shape our definitions of greed or abundance? Do we recognize the subtle influences around us? Maybe not. So, let's heed God's warnings and reflect on His teachings towards money and the things it buys, as we allow God to reshape our hearts.

Ice Breaker

Do you remember your first paycheck from your first job? What did you do with the money?

Key Passage

Then he said, "Beware! Guard against every kind of greed. Life is not measured by how much you own." - Luke 12:15 NLT

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Beware of Greed

*10 Those who love money will never have enough. How meaningless to think that wealth brings true happiness!
- Ecclesiastes 5:10 NLT*

Solomon was the wisest and richest king ever to live. He was able to experience a life of unlimited wealth, and yet his conclusion was that wealth doesn't bring true happiness. Why? Because we always want just a little bit more than we have.

Rather than focusing on what we don't have, let's take a moment to recognize what we do have to be thankful for. Name some of the best things in your life right now. What are you most grateful for?

If we allow ourselves to believe that what we have is never enough, we miss out on the abundance that God does have for us.

In Luke 11:39 Jesus calls out the Pharisees. He says they are full of wickedness and depravity, but he singles out only one specific area. It is their greed or robbery and plundering of the people.

39 Then the Lord said to him, "You Pharisees are so careful to clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy-- full of greed and wickedness!" - Luke 11:39 NLT

When you think of a greedy person, what is the image that comes to mind?

Our key verse (Luke 12:15) warns us to be on guard against "every form of greediness". So, there must be various things that constitute greed. And don't miss what follows- Life (that Greek word here is zoe and means an abundant life) isn't defined by how much stuff you own.

If we don't equate an abundant life with having lots of money or the things it buys, how do you think we should measure it?

As you look at the list below, you might find that you tend toward one of these types of "greediness" and have never recognized it for what it is.

Which of these might we view as normal, or even virtuous behavior without realizing that it is motivated by a type of greed? How would each of these behaviors be justified in our culture?

- *The Spender- motivated by Lust*
- *The Saver- motivated by Fear*
- *The one who needs to be first- motivated by Prestige*
- *The one for whom money makes them feel good- motivated by Pleasure*
- *The one who wants what someone else has -motivated by covetousness*

Before we conclude that God doesn't want us to have anything, let's look at Paul's advice to Timothy. Notice Paul doesn't say it is bad to be rich.

17 Teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. - 1 Timothy 6:17 NLT

Paul's warning is about where we place our trust. What are the two options he contrasts for placing our trust? What does it look like to trust in money more than in God?

It is hard not to consider that bank account or 401K as a lifeline or safety net in our lives, but at best, as Paul says, it is unreliable. There can be circumstances that quickly flip the narrative in our lives- economic downturn, natural disaster, unemployment, or illness to name a few. But even when our riches fall short, our God never does. Paul says God richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment. Notice the terms richly and enjoyment in what God provides. Remember all those things in

your life you are grateful for? God wants us to enjoy the good things in life that are not necessarily tied to money.

Can you share some occasions when God has been faithful to meet your needs, not only monetarily, but emotionally, physical or spiritually?

2. What God Owns

At the core of greed is a battle over ownership. We can be like the 2-year-old unwilling to release his toys, we hold on to what we have tightly and defiantly tell God "Mine!"

There are essentially 3 views of the ownership of things-

- o Non-Ownership (Community has authority over my stuff)
- o Ownership (I have absolute authority over my stuff)
- o Stewardship (God is owner/Giver and I am the steward)

So, the first question we must ask ourselves is, "What belongs to God (Deu 10:14)?"

*14 "Look, the highest heavens and the earth and everything in it all belong to the LORD your God. - Deuteronomy 10:14 NLT
8 Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. ... 15 The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it. - Genesis 2:8, 15 NLT*

Deuteronomy 10:14 leaves little doubt, everything belongs to God, even us.

Next question - If God is the owner, then what is my role (Gen 2:15)?

Recognizing our role as caretakers or stewards for God can take some getting used to. It is a big leap from the view of autonomy, independence and responsibility we usually hold.

Do you feel a sense of loss, or maybe offence as you consider yourself in the role of steward rather than owner? Can you feel gratitude for all God has entrusted into your keeping for Him? How would embracing a stewardship model in life change your view of tithing 10% of your income?

But wait, we think- "I worked hard to earn my wages and manage my funds, surely that belongs to me." Moses warned the Israelites about this attitude because God knew when they became prosperous, they would forget that He had rescued them from slavery and brought them to the Promised Land. The same is true of us. What do we owe to God?

17 He did all this so you would never say to yourself, 'I have achieved this wealth with my own strength and energy.' 18 Remember the LORD your God. He is the one who gives you power to be successful, in order to fulfill the covenant he confirmed to your ancestors with an oath. - Deuteronomy 8:17-18 NLT